Tales of a Porcelain Doll

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Tales of a Porcelain Doll

by MyEpithetIsBarrier

Summary

A fragile little girl, a young teen who is tired of everything, and a young woman ready to fight to make use of her curse. Snippets of Mera`s early life.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

Mera is seven. She sits with her back to the wall, one ear pressed against the crack in the door. She knows what they`re talking about. Her parents are talking about her, like always.

“Why would you bring her there? There was no need, she`ll just get hurt more for no reason!” Her father says.

She looks at her left hand, which is bound in a stiff cast. Mera`s mother brought her to a mall and told her to be careful and not trip. And Mera tripped. And now she`s hurt, and her parents are upset and maybe it`s her fault.

“Mera is a *child*! She deserves to go outside occasionally!” Mother exclaims. Mera has seen other children her age, running around and doing all the things she wants to do. But those children trip and fall and play fight and they don`t get hurt like Mera does.

Did she do something wrong? Maybe she should have just listened to Mother and been more careful.

“She`s – she`s a fragile little girl! We need to be careful with her!” Father says.

Mera`s head shoots up. Fragile? She`s heard that word in passing, but never took notice. Never listened properly. She is fragile.

She didn`t even try to keep listening. Fragile, she thinks. Mera knows some people have a special power, an Epithet. Hers might be Fragile.

She feels sick with dread as she slowly gets up, making sure not to hit her casted hand against a wall. If her Epithet is Fragile, she`ll be stuck like that. Mera won`t ever get to do what the children at the mall do.

She`ll never get to go to a park, or play, or run laps around the little machines outside the stores. Mera doesn`t want to be that. But she just might have to.

The floors creak gently as Mera slowly sneaks away from where her parents are arguing. She doesn`t need to hear any more

-/-

Mera is nine. She knows a bit more about her ‘condition’. She gets hurt and injured so often because she`s fragile, because of her Epithet. Mother and Father are always looking for something to help her with, something to heal her.

She stays in her room. The harsh Taiga Country winters have come, and snowflakes tap against her window soundlessly.

Other children will be in their rooms, too. Reading books, going on the internet, writing, making indoor crafts. Mera tries to find solace in that.

But it`s difficult when a huge group of children her age are having loud snowball fights just outside her window every day. Father checks in on her often, making sure she`s eating the food delivered to her room.

Mother drops in, but less frequently. Mother always tells her to never be jealous, to enjoy the things she is passionate about. Mera is good at so many things, yet none of them are what she *wants* to do.

She looks up from her sketch pad. The figure on the paper is life-like, almost identical to the girl outside, bright orange hair striking against the snow. The girl`s skin has an ivory quality to it, like she`s crafted of porcelain.

Mera knows she`ll never talk to the girl. The girl doesn`t even know she exists. But Mera wishes that she could at least say hello, what`s your name?

But that`s not an option. Mera is fragile. She pulls herself out of bed slowly, getting on her feet. She walks the few steps to her desk and opens her computer.

She can`t get the thought of the girl as a porcelain doll out of her head. Mera searches on the internet. Maybe there`s a doll out there that looks like the girl, and she could buy it?

Mera faintly registers that buying a doll that looks like someone she`s never met is strange. But she`s so lonely, it might be nice to have someone else in the room, right?

Her searching takes her to a series of videos. Tutorials. ‘Ultimate Guide to Face-Ups!’ one video says. All the videos are about customizing and painting dolls.

Mera watches the videos, one by one. Eventually, her ears only hear the calm explanations on how to create something beautiful from the plastic. She forgets being lonely, and the call of children outside seems to grow dimmer.

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Mera is ten. Her parents have explained everything to her. She will never be rid of her Epithet. She`ll never get to play outside at all. Mera will never be quite *normal*.

She hates it. She wants to be able to do things. Travel, go to a regular school, go shopping, have play fights, have friends.

But Mera can`t. Mother and Father say she can, if they find something to heal her Epithet, something to stop her from being so fragile. She waits and waits desperately for news.

Never more than a whisper of hope. She clings to those whispers with all her might. But soon enough, they all fade away, like ink in water.

She reads. She tries to make art. She watches more and more videos online, of people customizing dolls. She knows all the terminology now, face-ups, ball jointed dolls, different body types and heights and brands of dolls.

Mera enjoys watching things transform. She can see the whole year of changes just from her window, seasons passing, leaves falling. She likes watching a canvas become painted, or fabric becoming embroidered.

But she never changes. She barely grows taller; her hair stays long and blue-ish black. She never looks older than the day before. She is never rid of Fragile.

Mera glances out the huge window of her room. The glass has cracks along the base, from when she held her hand against it and it nearly shattered. She can barely touch glass before it starts chipping away.

Outside, there is a tall snowman. Not unusual. But it faces her window, stick arm raised. Like it`s waving to her. Mera sits up in her bed, shuffling closer to the window.

Yes, it`s waving. And someone *made* it wave to her. Mera`s heart jolts in her chest. Someone saw her, and made the snowman to wave at her, and say hello!

She can`t help but hope that it`s the orange-haired girl. Mera is seeing her more and more this winter, and perhaps Mera was seen back.

But Mera has been seen by someone, noticed, and given this little gift. She hopes they visit. Maybe she can end up with a friend? She dares not hope, but the idea sweeps her away into a sea of ideas and giddyness.

-/-

Mera is thirteen. She has grown apathetic. Her situation just seems more hopeless the longer she waits, the more insightful she gets. She has given up on the idea of someone or

something saving her from her pain.

She feels beyond saving. If there is something that can take away her Epithet, or numb it, that thing would be worth more than all her hospital visits combined.

Mera has grown to hate the snow. It freezes her, with her paper skin, and she refuses to lay under her satin blankets all day.

The entirety of her right leg is bandaged and casted, broken in three places from when she tried to escape her room, escape the house, for just one night. Mera regrets being careless enough to get hurt.

However, she has no regrets for trying to get out. She can`t wait five more years when she can move out and get a job. Even though she`s studied enough in art and history to easily get a job in those fields.

She reaches out to her bedside table, picking up her gloves. They didn`t stop her Epithet from affecting things, but it helped.

“A placebo” the Epithet specialist had said. “But a useful placebo. Let her have the gloves, it`ll help her in the short term, at least.”

She slipped on the gloves and tilted her head slightly so she could see the table better. Resting on a small pile of books was one of her customized dolls. Her mini-version.

Mera had gotten the idea from one of the people whose videos she watched, who made little skits with their dolls, and had a mini-version as well.

Now Mera`s had a whole doll-sized wardrobe of skirts, blouses, dresses, shoes, and an resplendent ball gown that had taken four days to sew. She loved every little piece.

She winced as she picked up the mini-Mera. Mini-Mera was decked out in a white blouse and indigo pencil skirt. The picture of an elegant, confident woman, dressed for business. Something Mera would never be.

She let out a strangled sigh, sinking lower into her pillows. And eventually, sleep took her away to somewhere nicer.

-/-

Mera is fifteen. She is *done* with everything. She can`t take her room anymore. She gets out to the rest of her house more often now, once a month or more. But only after countless incidents of threats, pleading, and promises to be careful.

She hates the snow outside, which is there almost three quarters of the year. She hates the children, for being so happy and yelling their joy where she can hear them. She hates the casts and bandages and doctors and the *pain*.

Mother says to try to count her blessings. She tries. She *tries* so hard. A family, enough money for all the hospital bills, a nice house, fancy clothes, access to the world through the internet.

And yet Mera doesn`t care about those anymore. She wants friends and parties and to go outside. Fragile. She is too fragile for any of those. She`ll hurt herself or the people near her.

She raises one hand, calling the shards forwards. Mera knows that from any wrong move, or if she tries to practice too much, she`ll pass out. Or worse. Far, far worse is possible than just passing out from exhaustion.

Most Inscribed start training their Epithet as soon as they find their word. She hasn`t gotten the chance to do that. Mera twists the glass around, forming it into shapes. It dances through the air. She feels *powerful*. Like she`s truly Inscribed, and not a regular girl trapped in her room.

The shards twirl and move, a light tinkling noise emitting from them. At the start, she took some glass from her window, but she can summon her own now.

She allows herself a tiny smile. Mera is nowhere near where she should be, and her stamina will likely remain at a one forever, but she can do this. She can try.

She looks over at one of her shelves, at the perfectly painted dolls there. The mini-Mera stares at her. A thin sliver is cut from each eye, reflecting how Mera`s own form has changed as her Epithet grew slowly.

Mera grins, and the glass shards from into one last shape, a snowflake made of tiny, razor-sharp pieces.

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Mera is seventeen. She trains. And she trains. Summoning glass, making shields, walls, shapes, and weapons out of it. Mera barely has to think to make a floor covered in thin shards.

She can feel how it affects her. Every injury hurts more than the last, each tiny scratch and scrape takes longer to heal.

But she`ll fight. Mera will fight until the day she dies to get stronger. To make use of her curse. Even if it kills her.

In the empty room she has designated for practice, everything is electrified. The air always seems tense and new. She loves it. Finally, somewhere that isn`t her room where she can go freely.

Mother and Father were against her training, at first. She had explained it repeatedly, pleaded, then asked one last time, before they relented. Albeit not without dozens of warnings to not overdo it, and to watch her health.

The warnings all fell on deaf ears. Once Mera had the room to herself, she started. Glass panes emerged from the crevasses and corners of the room, the cracks already formed.

Mera moves between the shards twirling through the air, moving in a complicated rhythm, sending the glass flying away from her whenever it got too close.

The fly shards eventually hover upwards, towards the centre of the rooms ceiling. Mera finishes the dance, turning to raise one arm towards the collection of glass.

The shards dance and spin, forming together. They form an eye, a tree, an intricate circular pattern, before finally a spiky ball, points facing outwards.

The crescendo. Mera slowly, slowly, pulls in her fingers, making a clenched fist. She raises it up higher, and the glass draws together, like it`s about to spring outwards in an explosion of shards.

She brings her hand down in one sharp motion, and the ball breaks, not into smaller pieces, but sand, tiny little grains. It falls as a silvery white powder to the floor, and Mera smiles, even though she`s exhausted.

The training is difficult and draining. But she won`t stop fighting. She won`t give up and live in her room forever. Mera is a wingless bird, and she knows it. But she`ll make wings of broken glass and fly, one way or another.

Even if it`s the last thing she does.

End Notes

If you know which doll customizer I was referencing in the fourth segment, you have won: *drum roll* my respect and admiration!

I thought "huh, I write a lot of dialogue and character interactions. how `bout I write something with just one character, and minimal dialogue?" and then I did.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!